SAE

Supervised Agricultural Experience

The Need for Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAE) in Agricultural Education

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The need for Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) programs in agricultural education is well documented in a series of textbooks and a large number of research studies on the subject. These resource materials also identify a continuing need to study the issues that impact SAE programs.

The three primary texts (*The Handbook for Agricultural Education in Public Schools, Methods of Teaching Agriculture,* and *Foundations of Agricultural Education)* available for the professional development of agricultural teachers discuss the need for and value of an SAE. All three texts argue that an SAE is an integral, intra-curricular component of agricultural instruction which, in conjunction with classroom instruction and membership in the FFA Organization, provides a comprehensive agricultural education program and student experience.

Newcomb, et al. (2004) in *Methods of Teaching Agricultural Education* states that an SAE is an integral part of agricultural instruction as a valued part of the teaching and learning experience. An SAE is important because it improves learning, student personal development, and career and technical development. Students who complete SAEs learn more, in part, because of their need to learn and the opportunity to practice what is taught. In the agricultural instructional program, supervised experiences often serve as interest approaches to instruction, sources of problems, and the application of learning.

Talbert, et al. (2005), in *Foundations of Agricultural Education,* emphasize that SAE expands the boundaries of the classroom to include the entire community. They suggest that SAEs aid in increasing student understanding of agriculture and in developing skills and abilities related to career development. An SAE adds to the instruction received in the classroom and also improves decision-making skills and memory retention. These authors indicate that students realize the following benefits from SAE:

- Development of decision-making skills, including career and personal choices
- Improved self-confidence and human relation skills

- Application of knowledge learned in the classroom
- Knowledge of a variety of occupations and careers
- Development of time management and record-keeping skills
- Document experience needed on job applications
- Discovery of areas of personal interest
- Practice of responsibility and development of independence
- Development of pride through personal accomplishment (p. 420-421)

Phipps and Osborne (1988), in the *Handbook on Agricultural Education in Public Schools,* focus on the role of SAEs as a means of linking theory taught in the classroom to real-world experiences. They suggest such linkages occur by making the instruction practical and meaningful. SAEs bridge the gap between school and work and provides opportunities to solve real problems through the application of principles. Individualized learning through an SAE develops a sense of ownership which stimulates pride and motivation. Classroom instruction becomes alive because of SAEs which, in turn, promote learning and increase the self-confidence of students.

Researchers who have studied and written about SAEs have confirmed the need for SAEs in agricultural education. Hughes and Barrick (1993) proposed a model for agricultural education with a holistic approach to individual development where the aims of an agriculture program could only be met, in part, through the individualized instruction of an SAE. Furthermore, researchers and teachers have learned that context is important in the transfer of knowledge in student learning (National Research Council, 2000). SAEs provide the context for the development of life skills and the transfer of knowledge and skills to real-world situations and problems (Dailey et al., 2001). SAEs provide a source for experiential learning and motivation for students (Camp, et al., 2000).

SAE programs are not only beneficial in the application of theory but also as an experiential learning tool (Dyer & Osborne, 1996). The student benefits of SAEs include the development of favorable work attitudes, values and habits; and the development of technical skills and knowledge (Stewart & Birkenholtz, 1991). Parents, the agricultural education program, the school and community also benefit from the SAE program (Barrick, et al., 1992). Students with special needs have profited from SAEs and receive benefits similar to those of regular students, including the enhancement of social skills and establishment of fulfilling career goals (Schwager & White, 1994).

Researchers have found a direct positive relationship between FFA membership and SAE participation (Retallick & Martin, 2005; Talbert & Balschweid, 2004; Thompson & Shumacher, 1998; White & Pals, 2004). SAEs have a positive economic impact in Missouri (Graham & Birkenholz, 1999), Iowa (Retallick & Martin, 2004) and Georgia (West & Iverson; 1999), including a positive return on investment (where the investment is teacher salary and travel, and the return is SAE income) for school districts in Iowa (Retallick & Martin, 2004).

Although teachers and researchers have identified the need for SAEs and have learned that SAEs have a significant impact on students and others, an SAE is not without its issues. Dyer and Williams (1997), in a synthesis of research on SAE supervision, conclude that teachers are a key provider of SAE supervision and that teachers, administrators and employers value the supervisory role of agricultural teachers in conducting SAE programs. A need for increased positive communication between students, parents and agriculture teachers regarding the significance of SAEs has been identified (Barrick, Hughes, & Baker, 1991). Similarly, many researchers have concluded that agricultural education teachers' attitudes and expectations have a strong influence on SAE participation and quality (Clark & Scanlon, 1996; Dyer & Osborne, 1995; Warren & Flowers, 1993). There is a perceived need to expand the concept and scope of SAEs to meet the requirements of a more diverse clientele (Barrick, Hughes, & Baker, 1991; Graham & Birkenholz, 1999; Retallick & Martin, 2004; Steele, 1993). Others have also identified a need for more in-service on SAEs (Dyer & Osborne, 1995; Graham & Birkenholtz, 1999; Ramsey & Edwards, 2004).

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